

AWAKENING

by Cheryl Phibbs

Cheryl Phibbs lives in Southern California with her husband and children. She is the owner of Heaven on Earth, a bookstore. Cheryl and her husband have been attending TMI programs since 1995.

I had read and enjoyed *Journeys Out of the Body* and *Far Journeys* in the early 1980s but became aware of The Monroe Institute only after reading *Ultimate Journey* in 1995.

Happily married with three children and a successful real estate business, I still felt that something was missing in my life. Some of my friends felt a similar lack, and it seemed to turn a lot of us into spiritual seekers. I had been a student of Eastern philosophy for many years, and the programs offered at The Monroe Institute were also intriguing.

I promptly signed up for the *GATEWAY VOYAGE*®, and a couple of months later I arrived in Virginia. During the *GATEWAY* program I listened throughout the week as my roommate and the other participants described experiences with spiritual guides, visits to crystal cities, conversations with departed loved ones, and aspects of their past or future selves.

Each day I did all the tape exercises and remained positive and enthusiastic. By the week's end, however, I had not had any visions or spiritual experiences. I was disappointed and I didn't understand why I wasn't able to have spiritual experiences like the others participants had.

On returning home I reflected on my week at The Monroe Institute. How could I justify the cost of the program, let alone the airfare from California? Although the late-night conversations, stories shared with my fellow participants, the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains, and swims in Lake Mirancon had been enjoyable, I'd had no worthwhile experiences to speak of.

But one thing I was aware of—maybe I was just a little bit different than before going to The Monroe Institute. There was an expanded sense of awareness. I felt more open. It was a bit challenging to explain this to my husband and request that he again watch our three children while I returned for another week to do *GUIDELINES*®. There was a strong inner sense that I needed to do another program, and I decided to trust the process.

Over the next few years I attended one or two programs a year, yet never felt that I had experienced anything life changing during any of them. My Personal Resource Exploration Program (PREP) sessions in the lab with Skip and Darlene during two *GUIDELINES* were also uneventful. On occasion there was an insight here or there but not much else.

For some reason, however, I still remained confident that something worthwhile was indeed happening. This helped me to relax about the way my experiences should be. There was always a “knowing” that I was in the right place. I started to feel grateful for each insight that came my way and began to notice that a small inner voice—my own guidance—was emerging little by little. I sold my real estate company and started to make small changes in the stressful areas of my life. And my annual trips to The Monroe Institute continued.

On one morning during what was probably my sixth program, we did a tape exercise that took us through the belief-system territory. Once again the tape experience was uneventful. But, a little later that day while finishing my lunch, I started to think about my personal beliefs. The image of a ball made of colored rubber bands—hundreds of rubber bands tightly wrapped one on top of the other—mysteriously appeared in my mind’s eye. Suddenly I realized that each rubber band represented one of my beliefs and these beliefs made up who I thought I was. Right in front of me was the source of my suffering. One huge rubber-band ball!

The magnitude of the challenge before me was overwhelming. I needed to get rid of each and every one of those beliefs to finally see the truth of who I really was. I longed to discover this truth and to feel whole and complete.

I moved to the Fox Den lounge and sat down alone on the couch. Participants moved around me chatting with one another and drinking coffee. I focused on the rubber-band ball in my head. The first belief I had was being a mom. I thought to myself, “This is not who I really am,” and the first rubber band was gone. I looked at the second rubber band and said, “I am not a wife,” and another rubber band was gone. And the next rubber band: “I am not a real estate broker; I am not the work that I do.” Another belief disappeared. “Only 1,000 more to go,” I thought to myself.

This process seems simplistic now, but at the time it felt like the most important and most difficult thing that I would ever do. I continued the process with my whole being engaged: “I am not a woman; I am not an American; I am not Caucasian; I am more than these beliefs.”

I looked deeper. The next beliefs would be more difficult to release. They were all the negative judgments accumulated since childhood. But I was determined to get through them all. As I began again, the entire rubber-band ball suddenly disappeared! I found myself sitting in a quiet, still place beyond my mind. My mind had stopped and my perspective had shifted. I was now identified with the truth of who I really was, not with who I wasn’t.

The truth is that I am not a body or a personality. I am NOTHING, NO THING AT ALL. The confines of every belief I had about myself had held me prisoner, and now the illusion was gone. In an instant there was no “Cheryl.” There never had been. Liberation! My life’s searching was over in an instant. There was no longer a reason to be anything, do anything, or have anything. I WAS EVERYTHING. There was no more yearning, I was finally free. The

sense of separation and the fears of the unknown that I once felt were gone. I felt whole and complete.

I returned home to California in a bit of a daze. I spent several months adjusting to this new paradox, knowing that I wasn't a physical body but that each day an alarm clock still woke me up. My ego defeated, I had some sad and fearful moments followed by ecstatic moments, knowing the truth of who or what I am. Now each day for me is a dance between illusion and the magnificent conscious awareness that we all are.

This spiritual awakening is what I had read about in my Eastern philosophy books. This awakening is what people are seeking when they go to India and study with gurus. In the end, it seems that the seeking itself continued my suffering. I needed to look at the source of the seeking to find the truth. What a surprise to find it in the Fox Den at The Monroe Institute.

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